

THE BALLAD OF HENRY JAMES AND THOMAS WOLFE

or Gunfight at the Verily In a Not Unsatisfactory State of Affairs

Corral

by R. Saalfrank

Weee-ee-ell, twasn't but in May —
The start o' spring in these parts —
When old Henry James caught young Tom Wolfe
Raidin' the local literary arts.

Now Tom dared Henry to a literary duel —
"I'm the natal genius here," he started to bawl —
Then Henry called Tom a big-collared ass
An' Main Street was cleared fer the brawl.

The two took their places at the crack o' dawn,
Though it weren't till dusk they met face to face,
'Cuz Henry James, true to form, took a long, convoluted, roundabout
way
that took in half the town,
An' young Tom couldn't find the place.
(he was *lost*)

"Give me your Aristotelian best," whined Tom —
He had his classic allusions drawn.

Henry replied, "Might I, declare, emphatically, thus I having had little
recourse in a matter so incident, to a future of matters, more
resplendent in their respective spheres as that which would soothe
the most monstrous, of barren, beastly souls but still no longer a
pitiful crier of truths yet soon evident, and I shall, will!"
An' the fight was on.

Tom's neck swelled like a mule with the draughts:

"Return, o angel, to the black Parnassan heights from which you fell, a
leaf

bound by the hills — as quick to strike in pleasure as in rage, an
ember flaming cinder your secret soul to the Theban glories — o
fire, o soul enough!"

"And you," said Henry, "in eminence, of too hasty yet never unanticipated fame, give chase, hopelessly the churning depths for that, having long hidden with disdainful pleasure, the unattainable pride of innocence, whilom you so feverishly and, with pain of fearful heart, dwell of your soul (the mythic, stalking beast,)"
Then the name-callin' started gettin' rough.

"Your brother wears army boots!" Tom shouted,
But Henry, bein' Freudian, knew what he really meant —
"You keep your penile deprivation fantasies to yourself!" he screamed;
"Tea and crumpets, tea and crumpets!" jumpin' up an' down, Tom went.

Symbolism flew hard an' fast;
Tom called Henry a Tory truffle-head,
While Henry struck back with some o' his stunnin' dialogue —
"You don't believe that, if you did you wouldn't wonder," he said.

Well, out come Tom's sister,
An' we all drew our breath:
Tom, bein' the autobiographical sort, was bringin' out his family
To talk old Henry to death.
(or at least make him neurotic)

Tom's pa brought a marble angel,
Which Tom's ma started swingin' around;
Tom's brothers started throwin' stones,
But ol' Henry stood his ground.
(I reckon he was used to heavy
metaphor flyin' around)

Tom brought out his girlfriend an' Aunt Jane —
'Thout end they came a-runnin':
Granma, Barber Joe, a lady on the porch,
The milkman, the mailman, Great-uncle Sunnin,

God showed up with Teddy Roosevelt —
Through it all Henry stood stock-still —
Attila, Bovary, twenty local barkeeps,
The piano teacher, Moses an' Buffalo Bill,

Aristotle, Euripides, Tom's chiropractor, Gandhi,
Ester Sloane, Thomas Sneale, Oona Strong —
Tom was pagin' through the phone book
When we realized somethin' was wrong.

Tom was out o' characters!
Pleased with genuine creativity, he started to shake.
"Vicum tu," he screamed an' froze —
Tom had made a grammatical mistake!
(it's supposed to be "Vicum te")

As Tom fell, fatally embarrassed,
A literary oak struck at the roots,
Henry strolled on over with his final blow:
"Aristotle wears army boots."

We knew that Tom was gone —
He lay there perfectly silent;
But then ol' Henry started too t' shake —
He wasn't used to much excitement.

He blanched an' staggered an' clawed his chest
An' with a wheezy "Nay" fell in the road;
His blood was oozin' out in fancy rivulets, formin' curlicues an' commas
an' such,
While Tom's just flowed and' flowed an' flowed.
(an' flowed an' flowed an' flowed)

The town was so quiet
With both our literati dead,
Someone called Doc Hemingway for his opinion:
"They're dead," was all he said.

epilogue:

Well, Tom an' Henry are lyin' in the graveyard that,
With the sagebrush comin' to leaf
An' the crabgrass startin' to cover the epitaphs —
Which are (thank God) mercifully brief.